

T E N N E S S E E F O L K L O R E S O C I E T Y

B U L L E T I N

Contents

Folklore as an Aid to the Teacher of History .	p. 71
Announcements . . . . .	p. 80
Suggestions for Collectors . . . . .	p. 82
A Critics' Column . . . . .	p. 84
Members and Funds . . . . .	p. 85
Membership List . . . . .	p. 86

---

VOLUME V

December, 1939

NUMBER 4

## FOLKLORE AS AN AID TO THE TEACHER OF HISTORY

A proper understanding of this subject calls for a discussion of two terms: folklore and history. Although many people have a general idea of the meaning of the term "folklore," they lack that definite conception which is necessary for a full comprehension of it, and quite often they have mistaken notions about it. For instance, not long ago, after the writer had made a talk to a group of teachers on the general subject, a member of the group arose and made an address on another topic. In the course of that address, when he wished to emphasize a certain thought, he said, "Now this is not folklore, it is the solemn truth that I am telling you." Evidently this man had the mistaken idea, which many have, that folklore is something composed wholly of exaggerations, untruths, or fantasies.

To clear up such misunderstandings, let us proceed to a definition or description of the term. One authority speaks of it as "the science which embraces all that relates to ancient observances and customs, to the notions, beliefs, traditions superstitions and prejudices of the common people." <sup>1</sup> Another calls it "the learning of the uncultured...that branch

---

1. Americana, Vol. 11, pp. 416-17

of study that relates to traditional beliefs, old-time customs, usages or observances preserved generally among the common people." <sup>2</sup> Still another speaks of it as "the comparative science which investigates the life and spirit of a people, or of peoples...." <sup>3</sup> From yet another source we have the following fairly comprehensive definition:

Folklore is the traditional oral heritage of a people. It includes songs and ballads; superstitions, signs, omens, cures, and racial or provincial customs; legends, tales, ghost stories; dialectical words, sayings, proverbs, similes, nicknames, place names, and in general the flavor of folk language; games, play-party songs, dances; rhymes, jokes, riddles, traditional anecdotes and yarns; and the vast lore of animals and plants.<sup>4</sup>

To combine the above ideas and for the sake of convenience, we may divide folklore into five groups: (1) folk speech and sayings, (2) superstitions and beliefs, (3) traditional customs, (4) songs and dances, and (5) traditional narratives. While all the groups may interest the teacher of history somewhat, the traditional narratives and customs will probably concern him most.

Now comes our second preliminary question, what is history? Here again we may profit by referring to a few authorities. One writer says that it "has to do with the past

---

2. International Encyclopedia, Vol. 8, pp. 757-59.

3. Webster, New International Dictionary

4. Bulletin of the Texas Folklore Society, 1934.

of humanity" and that it "aims to picture the entire life of the various races and groups of mankind at all times throughout the course of the long ages."<sup>5</sup> Another prominent historian says that history in its broadest sense is "all that we know about everything man has ever done, or thought, or hoped, or felt."<sup>6</sup> Still another writer calls history "...the sum total of human activities..." and further speaks of it as "...a record of all that has occurred within the realm of human consciousness."<sup>7</sup> These conceptions reveal the vastness of the subject, to say the least.

As a matter of fact, the word "history" is used in two ways. It may mean either a record of events, or it may refer to the events themselves. Originally the former conception prevailed, but lately the latter has become more common. Thus we speak of the history of England or the history of the United States, not with reference to any particular book, but with reference to things that are happening. Again, when something of importance is occurring we say that history is in the making; or when some group of people is engaged in a momentous undertaking we refer to them as makers of history.

Again, many historians have differed, and still differ, as to what kind of history should be emphasized most.

---

5. Lynn Thorndike, The History of Medieval Europe, ch. 1, "The Study of History"

6. James Harvey Robinson, History of Western Europe, I.

7. Americana, Vol. 14, pp. 205-64.



For a long time the heroic conception dominated. Then it was that super-humans like Hercules and Achilles appeared in song and story. Closely akin to this idea is the so-called "great man" conception of history, according to which events are interpreted in the light of the deeds of certain leaders. Not far removed, too, from this notion is the dynastic conception, which makes history largely a record of royal families. Some of you, no doubt, have tried to study the history of Egypt in this manner, but you probably became badly confused when you reached the twenty-seventh dynasty and forgot whether it was in the thirteenth or the seventeenth dynasty that Queen Hathshepsut lived and ruled. Many still cling to the military conception of history, which emphasizes wars, dates, and battles; while others think that political history is about the only worth-while kind. The Industrial Revolution forced people to think in terms of economic history, especially after Karl Marx had thrown his intellectual bomb shell into the ranks of historians by his Materialistic Conception of History. The rapid spread of big business and its undoubted influence on government and on society further contributed to that same trend.

Since then, the tendency has been to emphasize more and more the social, cultural, and intellectual phases of history. Writers of the subject seem suddenly to have become aware of the existence of the common man. To judge by their

products they appear to have decided that he is a central figure in world affairs and to have concluded that heroes, kings, dates, battles, dynasties, royal families, statesmen, and politicians should not crowd him out of view. Here is the very place where folklore comes in, for it is primarily and preeminently a study of the common people. Through it one can see them in joy and in sorrow, at work and at play, and in all conditions of life. An unlimited field is opened up to him who is interested, and an unparalleled opportunity is given to him who wants to become acquainted with ordinary people!

"But," says the average teacher, "how can I include a study of folklore in a history course that is already crowded?" The answer to this question involves several considerations. In the first place, take out some of the kings and battles and dates, if necessary, to make more room for the common people. Again, do not expect to find in books all this material about these people. Folklore is to be secured largely from folks, rather than from books, although a number of helpful books may be found that bear on the subject. This means that after the average teacher has familiarized himself with the nature of folklore so that he can explain it to others, he can then begin to collect it. He can start in his own community, for folklore, like charity, should begin at home.

"But," the average teacher says again, "just what can I do to coordinate history and folklore?" To answer this question the author here gives a number of concrete suggestions, most of which he has tried to his own satisfaction:

1. Have some grandfather tell your class a story of Civil War, pioneer, or reconstruction days. Its value will depend largely upon the one who tells it, and the teller may be rather hazy as to dates and other exact items; but the human interest item will be there.

2. Have some World War veteran tell some stories of his experiences. Let him tell the sordid and ugly side as well as the attractive one, for war certainly has its seamy aspects. It is commonly reported that ex-soldiers will not talk about their war service, but that is a mistake.

3. In cooperation with the music department, render a program of songs, with explanations as to their origin and meaning.

4. In cooperation with the English department, collect through your students the peculiar language expressions of your neighborhood, with such explanations as to their origin and meaning as people or books may be able to give you.

5. Have your students make a collection of the place names of your community, county, or other local area, with explanations as to the origins and significance of these names. In so doing, they will learn quite a bit of local history.

6. Encourage the collection of folklore and its use in term papers. As an experiment, you might list a number of the usual term paper subjects, then offer as an alternative a folklore paper. You will find that a number of students will choose the folklore paper, even though it may involve more work. In this connection, the local history story or the hero tale offers special attractions to the teacher of history in Tennessee. This state is exceedingly rich in such stories. There is hardly a county in the state that does not have its Champ Ferguson, or Joe Copeland, or other local hero, about whom a large amount of fact and legend have grown up. One of the student's tasks will be to distinguish fact from legend, which of itself is a valuable historical undertaking. Then many events of historical importance have happened in some sections of the state, and these should be utilized. Try to imagine, for example, how thrilling it would be for a student in the Pulaski public schools to write a paper on some legends or incidents connected with the work of the original Ku Klux Klan, basing his paper on interviews with old-timers of the town.

The teacher of European history will have to depend more on books than the one who teaches Tennessee or United States history, but not entirely so. Tennessee boasts of its Anglo-Saxon heritage, and more than one folklorist has pointed to the English origin of many of our peculiar language



expressions, songs, or daily habits. Moreover, a number of our citizens have lived or traveled abroad and can tell interesting tales about other peoples and other lands.

7. Start a folk museum. Ask your students to bring in articles that their ancestors used in their daily lives and work, and arrange these in an exhibit, with cards attached giving full information as to their history, ownership, and uses. Tell them how much more desirable it is to have articles put in a safe place where the public can benefit from seeing them than it is to have them hid away in some trunk or attic where nobody can see them. Many of the articles can be used in object teaching. The students will become positively enthusiastic and will take pride in helping to increase the museum, once it is started. They will bring in materials ranging all the way from arrow heads to spinning looms. Incidentally some of this enthusiasm may be transferred to the everyday study of their history lessons and result in improved work.

8. Join the Tennessee Folklore Society, an organization dedicated to the collection and preservation of the lore of this state.

Doubtless many expedients, other than those mentioned, will suggest themselves to the resourceful teacher of history; but these, at least, are suggestive. The closing statement of this paper is taken from the editorial page of the TENNESSEAN,

November 19, 1934.

There have been complaints that history deals only with the great, tells only of vast movements, of decisive changes, and outstanding leaders; that it ignores the common man as an individual.

Folklore, in a measure at least, fills that lack. By statement of fact, by influence and suggestion, it tells much of the story of the rank and file. From a study of the songs he sang, the dances he danced, the jokes he told, and the superstitions he entertained, of his games and riddles and cures, one can glean something of the character of the man of any period, and studied in connection with history a period can be reconstructed that has the semblance of minute accuracy.

Folklore is the embroidery of a people's history. It is often a better clue to the character and psychology of a country than is the cold and factual account of its history. It consists of the romance and poetry of a people. It is a treasure left by primitive races and pioneer peoples to be inherited by future generations and taken along with them on their forward and upward march of development. It enriches the soil where it springs up. It provides inspiration for painters and writers.

Recognition of the value of folklore has been accorded in an organization by a group of educators of the Tennessee Folklore Society. It was formed recently at a meeting at Tennessee Polytechnic Institute at Cookeville. Its purpose is to study, collect, and preserve and publish the folklore of this state. Special emphasis is to be laid on mountain, Indian, and negro lore....

This organization has undertaken a stupendous task, but one that should be performed. The material to be sought exists in abundance, but gradually it is being lost, and only its collection and recording will prevent the passing of much of it forever.

J. A. Rickard

## TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY BULLETIN

Volume V

Number 4

December, 1939

Published four times a year by the Tennessee Folklore Society

President

L. L. McDowell, Smithville

Vice-PresidentsE. G. Rogers, Carthage      W. S. McLain, Cookeville  
Harry L. Upperman, BaxterTreasurer

Miss Geneva Anderson, Maryville

Secretary and Editor of the Bulletin

Edwin R. Hunter, Maryville

Membership fee and subscription to Bulletin, one dollar a year

## The 1939 Meeting

We are giving here the program of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Tennessee Folklore Society which was held on November 4, at Carthage.

There was a good attendance and a lively interest in the entire program. The 1940 Meeting is to be in Nashville. The officers for the coming year are: President, L. L. McDowell, Smithville; Vice-Presidents, Neal Frazier, Murphreesboro; Frieda Johnson, Nashville; Edwin C. Kirkland, Knoxville; Secretary, Edwin R. Hunter, Maryville; Treasurer, Geneva Anderson, Maryville.

### The Program

The Early Doctor . . . . .	Mr. E. G. Rodgers	Carthage
Traditional Ballads in Hamilton County	Miss Ruby Duncan	Sale Creek
	Assisted by Mrs. Rosa Hughes	
Some Folk Songs . . . . .	The Watson Family	Smithville
President's Address. . . . .	Mr. L. L. McDowell	Smithville
A Musical Analysis of Songs and Ballads of Blount County	Miss Dorothy Horne	Maryville
A Membership Campaign for T. F. L. S.	Dr. C. S. Pendleton	Nashville
Folk Speech of the Cumberland's	Miss Bess Alice Owens	Pikeville, Ky.
Human Resources of Tennessee	Mr. J. Charles Poe	Nashville
	Commissioner of Conservation, State of Tennessee	
The Effect of Oral Transmission on Robin Hood and Little John	Mr. E. C. Kirkland	Knoxville
Tennessee Folk Ballads . . . . .	Mr. Otis Parker	Carthage
Tennessee Folk Beliefs Concerning Children	Dr. T. J. Farr	Cookeville

### The Leading Article

We have been grateful to have come to hand the text of an article prepared four or five years ago while he was still a resident of Tennessee by Professor J. A. Rickard, then of the History Faculty at Tennessee Polytechnic Institute at Cookeville. The article deals with the blending of the kindred interests of history and folklore in the curriculum of the schools in a way which is very suggestive and, coming as it does from Professor Rickard, carries the validating weight of successful experience.

Our gratification at the privilege of using this article comes also from the fact that Professor Rickard is the founder of the Tennessee Folklore Society. It was he who called the first meeting of the Society at Cookeville in November, 1934. He was the guiding spirit of that meeting and was the choice of the group for Secretary and Editor. But a few months after the organization meeting he accepted a call to the Texas College of Arts and Industries at Kingsville, Texas. That he is still much interested in our Tennessee Society's program and progress is evident in his sending us this article.



### Suggestions for Collectors

The Editor is on the search of materials for publication. Those who are making collections are urged to prepare them for publication. Those who have articles ready are urged to send them in. We are constantly receiving commendatory comments on the articles in our Bulletin.

Perhaps the editorial office can serve as a clearing house for limited collections. For example we list a few items here of which we should like very much to have more. If members have even only a few specimens perhaps they will be willing to send them in to be put with others into a full collection. We shall be careful to give credit to individual collectors in such compilations. Here are a few specific suggestions:

1. Snake stories: ~~joint~~ snakes, glass snakes, hoop snakes.
2. Proverbial expressions of the type called "fictitious quotations" or "Wellerisms" as represented by: "Every one to his own taste" as the old woman said when she kissed the cow, or "It won't be so long now" as the Indian said when he cut off his dog's tail.
3. Proverbial expressions around the name of a person, such as, To run like Snider's pup or to have as much of something as Carter had oats or to be as poor as Job's turkey.
4. In many rural communities where a family has been settled for three or four generations there develops a situation where, by the third generation, there are several persons of the same name, three or four Jim Browns, say-- and they call one Long Jim Brown and one Little Jim ~~Brown and perhaps~~ one Jim Andy Brown because his father is Andy Brown. Two cousins named Sam were differentiated as Long-toed Sam and Fiddler Sam according to one of our informants.
5. Stories authentic and legendary as to place-name origins.
6. The recent study in American Speech of Negro Names suggests a wide field for study both of family names and font names among Negroes.
7. Where are the legendary materials about Andrew Jackson? Authentic biography seems to have the facts pretty well in order but there is a store of apocryphal material

and mouth-to-mouth tradition that has not been recorded. One member of our group who is a qualified historian told us recently that it had been his habit in treating Jacksoniana to nail down the authenticated materials, but when some one said, "My grandfather told me something or other," or "My pappy knew an old feller that seen General Jackson once, and he said . . . ." his habit was to throw it aside. This point of view we can understand and respect, but just here we are pleading for the discarded material or oral tradition.

8. Materials regarding religious sects and movements. A ministerial friend of ours has a story of a rural community in East Tennessee where a church split into Tie and Anti-Tie factions, the rock of cleavage being whether one could or could not inherit the Kingdom and at the same time wear a neck tie. On Sunday morning the Tie-ites held Sunday School in the School house while the Anti-Tie-ites pitched horse shoes under the windows and in the afternoon the Anti-ties had Sunday School and the Ties pitched the horse shoes.
9. Beliefs regarding death and the dying. A discussion of Whittier's "Telling the Bees" produced this Tennessee version. A visitor in a rural home remarked that the bee hives had been moved since a previous visit. "O yes," they said, "we had to move them when Father died." That is, according to this belief, if there is a death in the home, the bees will leave if the hives are not moved.
10. Instances of folk etymology where the popular understanding of a word heard no doubt long before it is ever necessary to write or print it tends to give it a form different from its original. In a Tennessee community two generations ago there was a Presbyterian group known as Seceders. Their name still persists as the designation of a burying ground and not long ago a local newspaper carried a notice inviting interested persons to gather for the purpose of cleaning off the See-Cedar Cemetery.

## A Critics' Column

A suggestion made at the Carthage meeting was to the effect that a critics' column be opened in the Bulletin for the appraisal of current folk materials as they may be presented in radio program or in magazine fiction or novel or play.

We shall be very glad to institute such a column and to have both regular and irregular correspondents to it. We call for volunteers and as time goes on we shall perhaps ask for help from designated persons.

The points to be made will differ from case to case. Of ballad singing the criticism may be of tune or text. With a story or novel it may be of characters or social background. In Erskins Caldwell's Tobacco Road when the old grandmother fails to come back in from the woods and time passes and still she does not appear, some concern is expressed and Jeeter Lester, who is her son, says he'll be out in them woods in a day or two and he'll probably come upon her. Persons who have checked all other details of the folk ways of this play with what they have seen and known of tenant farmers have questioned the validity of this extreme of crass indifference of a man toward his mother. Upon such points in current folk materials criticism may very properly turn.

### Members and Funds

The future of the Tennessee Folklore Society in a large degree depends on the building of a strong and stable support in the way of a membership list.

Taking the roll of those who have paid dues for 1940 and those who paid 1939 but have not yet paid for 1940 as our hopeful interpretation of the term "present membership" we have now 112 members which means \$112.00 in the way of funds. So long as we can get our Bulletin printed under as favorable terms (no cost for labor, only for materials) as Maryville College has given us, we can continue to issue four modest bulletins a year. But last spring when N. Y. A. funds ran out and Maryville College had to charge us for the labor of making the Bulletin the cost was more than doubled. Four issues a year on that basis of cost could not be provided out of \$112.00.

Two immediate conclusions seem clear: (1) We must have more members; (2) Those who paid in 1939 and have not paid in 1940 must pay if we are to hold our ground.

You can help in two ways: (1) Help us get new members. Send us their names or enlist them yourself. (2) Pay your own 1940 membership fee if you have not done so.



## List of Members

In keeping with our custom we are closing this volume with a list of the active members of the Tennessee Folklore Society, listing those who paid dues in 1939 and those who have paid for 1940.

Those who have paid for 1940 are indicated by an asterisk before their names.

- \*Anderson, Geneva - Maryville
- Archibald, R. C. - Providence, Rhode Island
- \*Atkins, Rev. W. H. - Carthage
- Bass, William W. - Jefferson City
- Berry, Senator George S. - Washington, D. C.
- Best, Edwin J. - Fountain City
- Boyd, Dr. W. B. - Nashville
- \*Brown, Jennie P. - Nashville
- Brown, Mrs. Lillie H. - Nashville
- Burke, Dr. Charles B. - Knoxville
- \*Burns, Inez - Maryville
- Burshenall, Elizabeth - New York City, N. Y.
- Campbell, Dr. Claude - Norman, Oklahoma
- Campbell, Marie - Rome, Georgia
- Cantrell, J. B. - Alpine
- Cartwright, Benjamin A. - Norman, Oklahoma
- \*Case, Dr. Ralph T. - Maryville
- Chambers, Catherine - Gordonsville
- \*Cornwall, Ruby - Hartsville
- Crabbe, Dr. A. L. - Nashville
- Crawford, Dr. L. W. - Nashville
- Cooper, Hugh B. - Nashville
- Echols, Clara Dale - Wendover, Kentucky
- Evins, S. C. - Athens
- \*Farr, Dr. T. J. - Cookeville
- Fink, Paul M. - Jonesboro
- Fite, D. Harley - Clarksville
- Fogle, Mrs. Oscar M. - Pleasant Hill
- \*Frazier, Prof. Neal - Murphreesboro
- Gatwood, Prof. E. J. - Nashville
- \*Hairman, Ella - Nashville
- Henry, Clemmie Jane - Maryville
- Herndren, Prof. Joe - Houston, Texas
- Herzog, George - New York City, N. Y.
- Heydt, Hon. Herman - New York City, N. Y.
- Horn, S. F. - Nashville
- \*Horne, Dorothy D. - Maryville
- \*Hunter, Dr. E. R. - Maryville

Hussey, Dr. George B. - De Land, Florida  
 \*Jackson, Dr. George P. - Nashville  
 \*Jackson, Janie B. - Nashville  
 \*Johnson, Freida - Nashville  
 Johnson, Jessie K. - Maryville  
 Jones, Mrs. Flora - Alpine  
 Jones, Rev. Robert W. - Cookeville  
 \*Kirkland, Dr. Edwin C. - Knoxville  
 Klein, W. G. - Alpine  
 \*Lafrentz, Dr. F. W. - New York City, N. Y.  
 Lawson, Mrs. J. D. - Nashville  
 \*Lance, Edward - Cookeville  
 \*McClain, Mrs. Walter - Cookeville  
 \*McDowell, L. L. - Smithville  
 \*McDowell, Mrs. L. L. - Smithville  
 McGlasson, Cleo - Cookeville  
 McMullan, Lois - Nashville  
 May, Hugh J. - Double Springs  
 Milton, Mrs. Abbey Crawford - Chattanooga  
 Moore, Mrs. J. T. - Algood  
 Morgan, Dr. Arthur - Yellow Springs, Ohio  
 O'Dell, Mrs. J. L. - Cookeville  
 O'Dell, Mrs. Ruth - Newport  
 Owens, Bess Alice - Pikeville, Kentucky  
 \*Pendleton, Dr. C. S. - Nashville  
 \*Pendleton, Mrs. C. S. - Nashville  
 \*Poe, Mrs. Charles - Nashville  
 Reese, Congressman Carroll - Washington, D. C.  
 Riley, Susan - Nashville  
 \*Rickard, Dr. J. A. - Kingsville, Texas  
 \*Rogers, E. G. - Carthage  
 Rothermel, Theona - Pleasant Hill  
 Royster, Mildred - Carthage  
 Seeber, Clifford - Chattanooga  
 Sehom, Mrs. M. B. - Monterey  
 \*Shine, Dr. Hill - Maryville  
 Simms, Mrs. Edna L. - Gatlinburg  
 Smith, Dr. J. M. - Cookeville  
 Smith, Dr. Reed - Columbia, South Carolina  
 Taylor, Prof. Archer - Berkely, California  
 Terry, Mrs. Benton - Cookeville  
 Upperman, Dr. H. L. - Baxter  
 Wakefield, Paul - Cornersville  
 Wilson, Gypsy - Pineville, Kentucky  
 \*Young, Mrs. S. Hayden - Cookeville  
 Zuber, Leo J. - White Bluff

The Library, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky  
 Public Library, Bridgehampton, New York

Chattanooga Public Library, Chattanooga  
\*Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland, Ohio  
Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate  
\*The Library, Maryville College, Maryville  
Pleasant Hill Academy, Pleasant Hill  
The Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N. C.  
Mr. R. M. Kennedy, Librarian, University of South Carolina,  
Columbia, South Carolina  
Mrs. John T. Moore, Librarian, Tennessee State Library,  
Nashville  
The Library, University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
The Library, Vanderbilt University, Nashville